
*The Department of the Treasury
Office of Inspector General*

Report Title

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC: Security, Inspection, and Targeting of Vessel Containers at The Port of Charleston Can Be Improved (OIG-03-063; issued February 28, 2003) (Limited Official Use)

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Synopsis

The U.S. Customs Service's (Customs) original mission of collecting revenue has expanded to include ensuring that all goods and services entering and exiting the United States comply with U.S. laws and regulations. A major goal of Customs is to prevent the smuggling of drugs into the country by creating an effective drug interdiction capability that disrupts smuggling organizations. Interdicting illegal drugs entering the United States is a key component of the Nation's drug control strategy. After September 11, 2001, Customs changed its primary mission from drug interdiction to combating terrorism.

Our audit of the Port of Charleston was part of a series of planned audits at Customs seaports. The objective of these audits was to determine whether Customs targets, secures, and inspects vessel containers to prevent smuggling of implements of terrorism, drugs, and other contraband in an effective manner. The other ports we audited were Port Everglades, Los Angeles/Long Beach, New York/Newark, and Philadelphia. Together, these ports represent about two-thirds of the vessel container cargo entering the United States.

At the Port of Charleston, we found that additional actions were necessary to tighten security, better document and perform vessel container inspections more timely, and improve the targeting process. Our report provided 7 recommendations to the Customs Port Director to address these areas. We also reported two other matters requiring Customs headquarters action. These matters involved the availability and quality of manifest information for targeting purposes.

Customs was divested from the Department of the Treasury to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in March 2003 pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002. Accordingly, audit follow-up is the responsibility of DHS management.